

A&M students score big in beauty pageant

By Christi Erwin
THE BATTALION

Beauty pageants are trying to overcome the image of scantily clad, baton twirling, air-heads competing for a title and a rhinestone crown.

Today's winners of pageants are modern women who have it all — brains, ambition, and, of course, beauty.

Brandy Peacock, a senior journalism major, was fourth runner up in the Miss Texas USA pageant at South Padre Island on June 28, and Tricia Vail, Class of '94, was one of 12 semifinalists.

The two were chosen out of 127 contestants.

Peacock said she did not expect to do so well because this was her first pageant.

She was waiting tables at Fajita Rita's when the area director of the Miss Texas USA pageant suggested she enter the Miss Brazos Valley USA pageant, she said.

She entered and was chosen first runner-up, qualifying her to attend the Miss Texas USA pageant as Miss Brazos County.

Peacock said the Miss Texas pageant was not what she expected. "I expected everyone to be all fixed-up, catty and manipulative," she said. "Instead, I made a lot of good friends."

Peacock said the pageant was fun, but tiring. "We rehearsed every day," she said. "I never slept later than 7:30 a.m. and did not get to bed before 1:00 or 2:00 a.m."

All the work seemed to pay off when she got onstage, Peacock said. "I wasn't nervous," she said. "I just had fun, and I even managed to get in three 'gig' ems' on stage."

As for the competition itself, Peacock said at first she felt intimidated because she did not have false eyelashes, fake nails or big hair.

But in retrospect, she thinks her short hair and natural look worked to her advantage.

Peacock plans to compete again

next year, and she is interviewing to be a Star Search spokesmodel.

In addition to a modeling opportunity, she said the competition has given her more confidence.

"If you can get in your bathing suit in front of six million people," she said, "then you can do anything."

Vail, Miss Brazos Valley, said this was her second year at the Miss Texas USA pageant.

"This year I made it my goal to be in the top 12," she said.

Vail, who has been involved in pageants for three years, said pageants are a good way to improve yourself mentally and physically.

"It's important to grab any chance to develop yourself," she said.

Besides spending the year as Miss Brazos Valley USA, Vail is interviewing to be a buyer for Accent and hopes to get involved in city government.

Vail said the pageants of today are different from pageants of the past.

"In older pageants, (the models) were all clones of each other," she said. "Today pageants stress individuality."

"It's not just about the swimsuit competition," she said. "It's truly what is in your head."

Vail said Chelsi Smith, Miss Galveston County, was chosen as Miss Texas USA because she possesses all the qualities judges look for in a contestant.

"She may not have been the most beautiful, but her winning was about inner beauty," she said. "More than anything else, it's what is on the inside that makes you beautiful."

Nikki Pederson, area director of Miss Texas USA, agrees with Vail's perception of the changing pageant.

In pageants today, "superwoman (or) I-will-save-the-world kind of answers" are not heard, Pederson said.

"Today, women are more focused on their goals," she said. "They know what they want and how to get it."



A&M students Tricia Vail (left) and Brandy Peacock (right) participated in the Miss Texas USA contest.

Photo illustration by Bart Mitchell and Stew Milne/THE BATTALION

BANISHING APARTHEID



AP Photo - illustration by Stew Milne/THE BATTALION

South Africans lined up outside of a voting station in Johannesburg, guided but fenced-in by razor wire. Voters braved the long lines to participate in South Africa's first free elections.

A&M's South Africans look homeward with hope for a new country's promises

By Anas Ben-Musa
THE BATTALION

After four decades of apartheid and 300 years of waiting, South Africa's elections may have begun to realize the dreams of establishing a democratic society.

To Rapulana Seiphemo and other South Africans at Texas A&M, April 26, 1994 was the beginning of a new era.

It was the first time South Africa allowed non-whites to vote in the national elections.

"People have died, people have fought, people have spent years and years in jail just waiting for such a day," said Seiphemo, a senior theater arts major from Johannesburg, South Africa.

Seiphemo said it was the reason that he voted. He traveled to Houston and cast his vote.

The Texas A&M South Africans

The aftermath of the South African elections has reached across the ocean and touched A&M student Rapulana Seiphemo from Johannesburg and A&M research scientist Anthony Chinnah, who once immigrated to South Africa and lived in Durban for 19 years.



AP/Tom Holmes

Chinnah said that a person was classified into four categories, "...white, colored (mulatto), Asian (from China or India) or black." The most oppressed were black, he said.

Yet, Chinnah did not escape the grip of apartheid. His family was ordered to move out of their home in Durban in the early 1960s. Chinnah said his family was given \$10,000 for the house when the actual market price was nearly \$200,000.

The whole neighborhood was leveled and declared a white zone, he said.

Till this day, no white South Africans have moved in. Chinnah said they refused to move into the neighborhood. He still doesn't fully understand why. The memory of those days is a scar that will never heal, Chinnah said.

But the system of segregation in South Africa is different compared to what was experienced in the U.S. by black Americans, A&M theater professor Roger Schultz said.

"Not one place in South Africa did I see total segregation," Schultz said, who visited South Africa in 1991.

Schultz arrived on July 1, the day the Apartheid laws were repealed.

He saw all colors and ethnic groups beside each other. However, during his first day there Schultz saw the real horror of apartheid visiting the

township of Soweto on the outskirts of Johannesburg.

All he could say was "How could this be?"

"There was tremendous inequity, in the lifestyle of the people," Schultz said. "I saw the abject poverty and conditions, the squalor, the shacks."

News reports have brought back the images from the transition, a mostly peaceful one.

"The spectacle is a political and human 'miracle,'" said two reporters from U.S. News & World Report. "As other nations in Europe, Africa and elsewhere are torn limb from limb by old grievances, new greed and ethnic hatred, the most deeply and bitterly divided country in the world, a nation long ruled by racist laws and consumed by racial, tribal and ethnic hostilities is poised to bind its wounds and start over."

The key to starting over say Seiphemo, Chinnah and Schultz is and will be the infinite patience of South Africans.

"It defies human belief and understanding," Schultz said. "The control of fear and anxiety."

Seiphemo said you could see the black people's extreme patience during the elections.

"People were standing in really long lines, spending a whole day, waiting to vote," he said.

Schultz said patience brought changes in the law and the basic government.

"But, apartheid still exists in practice and will take a tremendous amount of effort to change," Schultz said. "The waiting game is still being played."

It is a game that deals with economics, Schultz said, citing that nearly 95 percent of wealth resides in the white minority of South Africa.

With increased investment by foreign companies, all of South Africa can prosper, Chinnah said. Several companies, including Pepsi Cola, Sara Lee, Reebok, IBM, and Procter & Gamble have established operations in South Africa, making their stake in the future of the nation.

The economic waiting game is bound to continue, but a level playing field may be in the works for a mending South Africa, including their A&M compatriots.



By Jeremy Keddie
THE BATTALION

Beneath the roads and sidewalks of Texas A&M, lies a labyrinth of mysterious tunnels and lore known to the few who travel them. In winter the steam rises from beneath the roads, but it is not until one walks over a vent, receiving a blast of hot air, that summer strollers realize what is under them.

Prohibited on account of the many dangers contained throughout them, the steam tunnels have naturally generated curiosity among students.

The mystery begins with the history of the steam tunnels. Thought to be originally constructed in 1916, the tunnels were built as shelter for utility pipes, which provide the campus with heating, cooling, and domestic water.

There is little mentioned of the steam tunnels' history at the university's archives, and only one account, aside from newspaper clippings, depicts student exploration of the tunnels. In George Sessions Perry's book "The Story of Texas A and M", Corps of Cadets use of the tunnels is mentioned.

"Incidentally, the steam is piped through many miles of tunnels connecting each of the buildings," Perry wrote. "Sometimes one class or company, or whatever sort of group, has gone to raid another by means of these subterranean approaches and has encountered its like-minded adversary in mid-tunnel."

A journey into the steam tunnels, provided by Sam Porter, employee of the Physical Plant, provided proof of the Corps presence of the tunnels. Graffiti and squadron emblems from various units illustrate the walls and pipes of the tunnels. The most impressive included a large room beneath Heldenfels Hall, which is completely covered with Corps artwork.

"I don't know how someone got into here, unless they had a key," Porter said.

The basement room underneath Heldenfels is locked at three different points and contains motion sensors near the gates of the tunnels for security.

However, members of the Corp are not the only ones who have left their mark in the tunnels. "R.A.B.", a slogan from Moses Hall, a northside dormitory, ranks among the popular spray-painted phrases.

Porter began the two-hour tour revealing a scar from the hot piping while working in the tunnels. Steam pipes within the tunnels can exceed temperatures of 180 degrees, and varies based on the number of leaks and the current condition of the insulation of the pipes. His point was made.

"You see that pipe right there — that will burn you in a heart beat," Porter said. "There is no need for students to be down here."

"This is strictly a maintenance area."

However, steam and hot pipes are only few of the dangers that an illegal explorer will encounter within the steam tunnels.

"Should someone come down here and not pay attention to what they are doing, they could easily slip on the mud and silt and hurt themselves on pipes or other protruding objects," Porter said.

The only ventilation provided in the steam tunnels comes from grates and vents in the sidewalks



Both photos by Stew Milne/THE BATTALION

Texas A&M's steam tunnels (above) house dangerous hot water pipes and electrical wiring, as well as graffiti (right) from illegal Corps and residence hall travelers.

and streets, which allow rain water to flow in and leave slippery mud and silt deposits.

Water also accumulates on the floors of the tunnels from leaking pipes. Porter said leaks are generally minor, but at any given time something major could go wrong.

"Should a pipe break causing water to flow, that water will get real hot once it reaches the level of the steam pipes and present an extreme hazard," Porter said.

Yet, these potential hazards also allow students to easily access the tunnels.

"We have no way to secure the tunnels at all times due to the safety hazards which (preventive measures) would present to our workers," Porter said.

As most tunnelers ignore the possible dangers, the only means of deterring students from exploration remains through disciplinary procedures. Students caught in the tunnels risk arrest by the University Police Department and can be charged with criminal trespassing. Furthermore a report by the police department can be filed with the Student Conflict Resolution Center for secondary punishment.

"Students caught in the steam tunnels will receive an administrative hearing and can receive punishment ranging from a written reprimand to probation," said Kim Walter of Student Affairs.

Walter said she does not recall the last time an incident occurred, nor did the University Police Department's Assistant Director of Criminal Investigation Josie Hoelscher.

However, seven individuals were arrested while trying to escape the tunnels in 1986. The individuals had triggered an alarm near Heldenfels.

The motion detectors and alarms were placed as a means of security, and are located in tunnels near buildings as a means of security.

But most tunnelers continue to explore. Many choose to tunnel in hopes of dispelling myths which they heard from their friends.

One myth is the belief of an ammunition dump below Kyle Field. Rumor has it that weapons and excess ammunition left after World War II are stored there.

However, Porter said he doubts any such thing exists and snickered.

"I have been working here for 13 years and haven't found such places," Porter said.

US'

of Aunt the e her

ave orical ters

'ox- ie and yor of to t mul-ll's emi-

e of o

and s Day, l she d will